Violence Against Women and Violence Against Children – The Points of Intersection

Causes, Consequences and Solutions

Alessandra Guedes, Sarah Bott, Claudia Garcia-Moreno and Manuela Colombini

This document summarizes key information published in the article “Bridging the gaps: a global review of intersections of violence against women and violence against children”

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The international community has recognised violence against women (VAW) and violence against children (VAC) as global public health and human rights problems.1-3 According to World Health Organization (WHO) estimates, globally, nearly one-third (30%) of ever-partnered women have experienced physical and/or sexual violence by a partner, and about 7% of women age 15 and older have experienced sexual violence by a non-partner, with wide variations by region.4 The United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) estimates that 6 in 10 (almost 1 billion) children worldwide aged 2-14, experience regular physical punishment, and even higher proportions (about 7 in 10) experience psychological aggression, ‘harsh physical punishment’ - being hit hard repeatedly or on the face - affects an average of 17% of children from 58 countries where data are available, while about 1 in 10 girls under age 18 (approximately 120 million) worldwide have experienced forced intercourse or other unwanted sexual acts.5 Boys also report sexual abuse, usually at lower levels than girls.6 Studies from many countries also document high levels of emotional abuse and neglect of children.7

Research, programmes, and policies on VAW and VAC have historically followed parallel but distinct trajectories, with different funding streams, lead agencies, strategies, terminologies, rights treaties, and bodies of research.8,9 Some researchers and practitioners have called for more efforts to bridge this divide based in part on evidence that research and services focused on one form of violence in isolation from the other may overlook important risks, vulnerabilities, and consequences of multiple forms of violence within families and across the lifespan.10,11,12,13,14

There have also been calls for closer collaboration between the two fields to help countries achieve and measure progress towards ending both forms of violence,15 as they committed to do as part of the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals and targets.16

Potential Risks with Integrating the Fields

Greater coordination between the two fields may pose certain risks, and there may be valid reasons to work independently in some circumstances. Potential risks may include:

• Will children’s rights take precedence over women’s safety?
• Will women be penalized when children are exposed to intimate partner violence?
• Will women’s needs be overlooked?
• Will children’s voices be heard?
• Will services be adequately tailored to the needs of children and adolescents?
• What about intersections with other forms of violence?

These challenges deserve discussion but should not stop either field from seeking greater collaboration when appropriate.
INTER-GENERATIONAL EFFECTS

- Consequences of VAC last into adulthood
- Partner violence affects: low-birth weight, under-5 mortality, children’s mental health and development
- VAC increases risk of perpetrating or experiencing violence later in life

COMMON & COMPOUNDING CONSEQUENCES

- Similar mental, physical, sexual and reproductive health consequences
- Exposure to multiple forms of violence (polyvictimization) may have cumulative, compounding effects

ADOLESCENCE

- Period of elevated vulnerability to some forms of VAC/VAW
- Perpetration and victimization often begin in adolescence
- Early marriage and childbearing are risk factors for both VAW and VAC
- Adolescents sometimes overlooked by both fields
- Prevention opportunities exist
Collaborative Solutions

Implement and enforce laws criminalizing abuse and exploitation of both women and children.

Promote gender norms that do not accept violence against women or violence against children.

Improve access to safe and responsive prevention and support services that are age and gender appropriate.

Integrate material on gender socialization and equal treatment of girls and boys into home and community-based parenting programmes.

Promote the integration of a gender perspective within microfinance programmes.

Strengthen intimate partner violence prevention programmes and ensure they also consider children both directly and indirectly exposed to violence.

Moving Forward Together

- Change social norms that deem violence against women or violence against children to be acceptable
- Focus prevention efforts on both violence against women and violence against children
- Promote an age-appropriate and multi-faceted response
- Close the gaps in research and promote coordination in measuring progress toward 2030 Sustainable Development Goals